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BEWARE OF THE BUBBLE MONSTER

By Paul Lambrecht

(FOR PW)

Trent Missile found himself in circumstances increasingly commonplace nowadays, upside down in his ranch-style split-level custom starter McMansion underwater treading water investment property.

He'd packed all his shit into boxes.

Even his bong. Ten feet tall and made of glass. You had to stand on the landing in the middle of the staircase to take a hit. Those had been some fun parties.

The Bubble Monster had started watching from the reeds of the nearby water trap on the 16th hole of the neighboring golf course. This had been back in early '08, when times were flush. Certainly wouldn't have seen this coming.

Waiting. Lurking.

It was now 2010. The Bubble Monster cruised around the neighborhood in a blue convertible Beamer with the vanity plate, "BLUBMW" emblazoned across the back, his fortunes the inverse of everyone else in the gated community.

Trent had went to the bank to beg to keep his house, a satchel full of tear-stained receipts in hand, eyes bloodshot from a last toke from his repo'd bong and incessant crying, but the Bubble Monster had beat him to the punch, and had already served as the second signatory on the foreclosure agreement.

His filmy splotchy moniker simply read "BM".

Trent's back-up plan was rash but necessary. Throughout history there was only one way to deal with monsters. Form an angry-mob of pitchfork-wielding grievants.

The only problem was, no one knew where the monster lived. He parked his blue convertible Beamer on the 16th green, surrounded by a mess of razor wire, which was kind of weird.

The most irksome part of it all was that this had been Trent's old ride. It had a sweet sound system. Legit. Experimental Tokyo underground lab technology. Then one day he'd went out to the driveway to find his car gone.

He hadn't expected to catch a glimpse of it later that day on the golf course, as he walked to the bus stop. But his key no longer worked, and the interior was coated in a rainbowy phlegm-looking substance.

He'd cried until an irritable gurgling sound from the water hazard frightened him off.

In the days following, the Bubble Monster appeared ubiquitously in the car like a mad Mafia don. Knocking on doors, collecting fruit salads and earnest kid-drawn pictures like protection money—darling homey pictures of houses with swirling smoke crayon-plumes and smiling honest families. The Bubble Monster was temporarily appeased by such humble tokens.

Trent he seemed to have no use for, unfortunately. He often sat in his comfortable leather interior, rubbing it

in, glowering at Trent from across the street. Aiming a fake gun at his temple and blasting it off for a laugh.

"Why don't you just pop him? He's only a big bubble?" asked Tamara, his ex-girlfriend, before she'd left him for the ID-checker at the local YMCA, the only guy they knew who still had a decent job.

Trent had no satisfactory response for this, except to say the best minds among them had already tried.

To find a way to pop the bubble.

Trent had lost his job selling ARM's for Countrywide some fifteen months back. And he hadn't been able to find a good match for his narrow skill set of lying and screwing since.

Politics? A man could dream.

The authorities: politicians, police etc. said that while the Bubble Monster's harassment of the townspeople was regrettable and mean-spirited, they were under pressure to disbelieve in the foul specter's existence as a pillar of their institutional culture. And therefore, even sworn affidavits testifying to the beast's atrocities fell on deaf ears.

Clearly, the answer was concerted vigilantism.

One night, Trent tailed his old car down the cart paths to the 16th hole and lay in wait behind a cactus to

see where the monster went after he'd parked on the swirling donut-carved green.

What he saw he couldn't believe. The monster slimed out of the front seat, stood up, looked around stealthily, and comfortable no one was looking, appeared to deflate and distend over the surface of the water hazard until he was just a coat of sheen.

The monster had to return to the water to rest apparently. To resume his untautened form at periodic intervals.

The beast grumbled from within the pond, and Trent's scheister mind began to spin its deathly wheels.

The next morning, he decided to take the day off from half-assed job hunting and walk over to the 16th hole and examine the trap.

It was black and brackish from its foul tenant. All of the offending golf balls which had accumulated along the bottom of the pond over the years had been chucked back out into the surrounding overgrown kikuya.

Trent felt better after he'd peed in the pond. The urine crackled and sparked as it ricocheted off the black sheet of pitch.

He was very careful who he discussed his find with that evening. The Bubble Monster had a lot of spies in his network.

He told Pete who was losing his wife, car, and home. He told Stanley who was losing his wife, car, home, and kids. He told Phil who still had a good job, no wife, but who was definitely losing his hair.

They were all in to get the bastard. Except for Phil. He said he was with them in principle, but didn't want trouble if it came down to it. But he said he'd still buy the beer, so they all decided he was still an okay guy. Phil didn't change anyone's opinion that night.

Then the plot was hatched. Stanley had been the greenskeeper at the now abandoned golf course. He was able to pry up the spike strips at the entrance the Bubble Monster used and reverse them. A dart gun and a few sixty pound bags of cement mix would finish the job.

Two things they hadn't counted on was the speed of the wind and how drunk they would ultimately be when they finally heard the explosive pop of shredding tires. But things went mostly according to plan. The fourth dart pierced the soap-film skin of the Bubble Monster. Quickly he had to recohere in his pond before he deflated completely. He made for it in a wafting depressurizing

panic. The banshee-like wails of foreclosed souls swirled out of his pop-wound into the silent moonlit zephyrs of the cool autumn night.

He blindly jumped into the Olympic-sized pond of wet cement and there, spread out like an iridescent starburst, expired to the sounds of beer-fueled laughter and high-fives, entombed by the tacky cement.

The Financial section of the local paper carried his obituary the next day.

"Local Trio Slays Vicious Housing Bubble."

For weeks they were the toast of the town. Trent even had a job interview scheduled.

But their joy and self-respect were to be short-lived. The article was sage in that it hadn't even entered its fourth paragraph before the authors were sounding the horn on another monstrous entity hurricaning in from the coast, wiping out vast swaths of America's factories and storefronts. The National Debt Spiral was now a Cat 10, and about to drop trillions of tons of obscure financial instrument precipitation and blast 170 mph winds of hopelessness and immutability.

Trent Missile sighed. A regular guy like him was just never going to get ahead. But a man could always dream.

End.